Programs and Services

Farm and Food Report, Week of May 29, 2006

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THE CENTRE FOR AGRIBUSINESS TRAINING AND EDUCATION IS ON THE MOVE

The Centre for Agribusiness Training and Education (CATE) is enhancing the services it offers on the Internet. CATE is an initiative of the Saskatchewan Council for Community Development (SCCD) designed to connect those seeking training in agriculture and agribusiness to the relevant training programs.

CATE consists of a website (www.agtraining.ca) and a toll-free CATE phone line for those who may not have access to the Internet or need assistance in finding specific training information.

"CATE's mandate is to establish that critical link between rural residents and training and career development opportunities," explains Verona Thibeault, CATE's co-ordinator. "We have gone beyond the initial mandate of exclusively agribusiness and on-farm education and training, to offering a broader range of training opportunities."

Thibeault describes CATE as "a on-line gateway or information clearing house of all the opportunities and courses available to farmers in North America."

"Once you bring up a particular course on the website," she says, "CATE will tell you whether it is a workshop or a distance-education opportunity. It will connect the person to the institution, so he or she can see if it is the right fit."

Courses range from agribusiness accounting to Chinese traditional medicine, and many of these courses are already, or likely to become, eligible for financial assistance if taken by rural residents, says Thibeault.

CATE recently entered into a partnership with Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food (SAF), the delivery agent for the Canadian Agricultural Skills Service (CASS) program in Saskatchewan. Through this partnership, on-farm residents can access training opportunities that are eligible for funding.

"We work with SAF on a weekly basis," says Thibeault. "They inform us of courses they have approved. We upload those courses to the website, and attach a little symbol to show that they have been approved by the Saskatchewan CASS program. With the website, you can quickly see which courses are available, and then go through the application process."

Funding for the website and the CATE toll-free line pilot project is provided by the Canadian Adaptation and Rural Development in Saskatchewan (CARDS) Program and Saskatchewan Learning.

To find out more about CATE, call the toll-free CATE line at 1-800-641-8256.

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UPCOMING SASKATCHEWAN PASTURE SCHOOL IN SASKATOON

The 2006 edition of the Saskatchewan Pasture School will take place at Saskatoon's Heritage Inn on June 14 and 15.

Once again, the organizers are limiting registrations to 50 in order to make this hands-on event as rewarding as possible for participants. The school is held in Saskatoon because of its central location, and because the proximity to the tame and native pastures and to Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) resources makes it possible to offer a much more comprehensive program.

"The pasture school is designed for producers, and the goal is to help them improve their forage and pasture management skills," says Al Foster, Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food Forage Development Specialist, one of the school's organizers. "Therefore, we try to ensure that everything in the program is useful to livestock and forage producers, that it will increase their knowledge."

Topics for the first day of the two-day school include principles of pasture production and grazing management, calculating stocking rates, forage establishment and assessing pasture condition.

In addition to classroom sessions, pasture tours take producers out into the field to discuss practical problems and techniques of good forage and pasture management. The first day will conclude with a barbeque and a producer panel, which will give participants an opportunity to hear and share their experiences with other producers.

The second day will include discussions of annual crops for greenfeed, pasture and swath grazing, pasture rejuvenation options and herd health. A session entitled Matching Animal Requirements to Forage Quality will be delivered by Allan Iwaasa of AAFC, which will teach producers how to ensure they have top quality forage at the point in the season when the animals require quality. Another session, entitled The Economics of Grain to Grass, will be led by Lorne Christopherson, a producer from Weldon who collaborated with the Western Beef Development Centre on a project to determine the economics of turning grain land into pasture.

The second day will also feature another field tour, this time to the AAFC Saskatoon research station, to view and discuss forage varieties for hay and pasture.

The Saskatchewan Pasture School brochure may be downloaded from the Western Beef Development Centre website at www.wbdc.sk.ca.

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NEW PRAIRIE SWINE CENTRE SCIENTIST ADDS TO PIG NUTRITION EXPERTISE

Just a few weeks ago, the Prairie Swine Centre announced a research project that would provide significant insight into how

pigs use the energy they get from canola. The research scientist leading this project is Dr. Pascal Leterme, a Belgian who has been with the centre for less than a year.

Dr. Leterme is in charge of the Nutrition Department at the Prairie Swine Centre. He deals with the nutritional evaluation of the ingredients in swine feed, and how they are used in swine nutrition. This project will also look at the possible effects of the ingredients on gut health and the excretion of nitrogen into the environment.

"Our aim is to formulate diets that reduce the impact of pork production on the environment," he says.

Initially, Dr. Leterme's team was studying peas to determine their nutritional value. With some financial help from the Saskatchewan and Alberta pulse growers associations, his team collected pea samples from across the Prairie region, with a wide range of chemical compositions. The team will determine the nutritional value of the peas in weanling and growing pigs and in sows in order to optimize their use in swine nutrition.

The recently announced canola project, which is being funded by the Saskatchewan Canola Development Commission and the Canola Council of Canada, has similar aims.

"We will determine the nutritional value in growing pigs. In sows, we will determine the value of canola meal, but also of the benefits of using full seeds," he explains.

Dr. Leterme also has a third project under way that is funded by a private company in Belgium. That company buys 100,000 tons of flax seed a year from Canada to produce soap and detergent from the oil, but then flaxseed meal remains. At the moment, the market for flaxseed meal is saturated in Europe. Leterme is investigating whether there is any advantage to using flax meal in swine rations. Flax is the richest plant source of secoisolariresinol diglycoside, which hogs convert into phytoestrogens, and may have some benefits for the sows' reproductive systems.

"We will be working on flaxseed meal, but the idea of 'functional feeds' is something we want to develop not only for flax, but also for peas, canola and other food products used in the Prairies," he says.

Dr. Leterme brought with him an impressive list of credentials when he moved to Saskatchewan nine months ago. He came to Canada from the National School of Veterinary Medicine in Lyon, France, where he taught animal production. Prior to that, he was in South America at the National University of Colombia, where he was in charge of a new research laboratory in animal nutrition. His research, which was partially funded by the Belgian government, the International Atomic Energy Agency and the Volkswagen Foundation, led to the development of a program in sustainable pork production for small farmers. Prior to that, he conducted swine nutrition research in Belgium.

What does he think of his new work environment?

"I like it here because there is a strong relationship between the research sector and the private sector. It is more developed than in Europe, where I worked mostly in public institutions. It seems that here, there is a stronger relationship between public institutions and private companies."

Given this, it is likely we will hear from Dr. Leterme regularly, as he helps develop sustainable hog production practices in Saskatchewan through his contributions at the Prairie Swine Centre.

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STOMP PORK FARM RECRUITS EMPLOYEES FROM CHINA AND THE PHILIPPINES

When finding enough qualified employees becomes a challenge, attracting immigrant workers with the right credentials becomes an attractive solution. That is what Stomp Pork Farm of Leroy, Saskatchewan, has undertaken to do, according to Human Resources Manager Corrine Kelly.

"We have a partnership with Canada Livestock Services out of Lloydminster, and they do recruitment in the Philippines and China for us. Lately, we have been focusing on the Philippines because Filipinos seem to be the right candidates for our farm. A connection was made between the manager of a large pork co-operative in the Philippines and a human resources consultant with Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food's Livestock Development Branch, and we took it from there."

Kelly says Stomp Pork Farm recruits 10 per cent of its workers from other countries because there are simply not enough trained hog barn workers in Canada and Saskatchewan. Stomp Pork Farm employs 100 people at its head office in the Rural Municipality of Leroy and 300 people in total across the province.

"We look for a minimum of three years experience in a hog production unit, in combination with some agricultural diploma or certificate. In order for them to be eligible for the Saskatchewan Immigrant Nominee Program, potential employees must have experience in hog production."

The Saskatchewan Immigrant Nominee Program (SINP) is a provincially administered program that operates under an agreement with the federal government, which allows the province to establish immigration priorities and selection criteria that reflect the particular needs of Saskatchewan employers.

The majority of Stomp's immigrant workforce is people with families, Kelly explains, "although some are single. We have probably a 50-50 split of men and women. They arrive first on a work permit, and while they are here they complete the nominee paper work. When that is approved, we can offer them permanent positions. In the barns, we find them to be very conscientious with the animals. They want to make a good living for their families."

Kelly and her team do everything possible to ensure that they keep their new workers for a long time.

"I pre-arrange housing for them. We go around town looking for accommodations for them. We stock the suites with some miscellaneous items like bedding. If it is winter, we get them some winter coats and maybe a little bit of food in their cupboards. After all, they are not going to bring everything from their kitchens to Canada. We do this so they can be a little more comfortable when they arrive, and can get going before their first pay cheque."

Stomp Pork Farm welcomed its first immigrant workers in December 2004.

"The first group arrived from China. Our first Filipino worker arrived in March of this year, and four more will be coming in October. So far, we have welcomed 15 immigrants, plus their families," Kelly says.

"The harshness of the weather is the hardest thing for them to adapt to, as well as the small size of some of our communities—especially if they come from Manila. The Philippines is a country of 89 million people. It is densely populated there compared to rural Saskatchewan."

Though she has travelled to the Philippines to set up the program, Kelly doesn't believe she will have to go back there on a regular basis, because of an arrangement Stomp Pork Farm has made with Canada Livestock Services to do all the pre-selection work there.

"They read the resumes, and I go through the final selection. I have met all the workers who are coming now, but, if we do any further recruiting, I likely won't meet them until they arrive in Canada."

Kelly says Stomp Pork Farm is very optimistic about this initiative. They strongly believe in the SINP, and in the selection criteria that has been set. Management ever underwent cultural awareness training to give them some sense of the Philippines and the type of workers they will be employing.

Kelly stresses that her company's initiative in China and the Philippines does not take away any jobs from Saskatchewan residents.

"It is just one of a number of initiatives in the Stomp Pork Farm human resource strategy," she says.

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PEG'S KITCHEN: FOR THE GOODNESS OF HOMEMADE FOODS

Even in the age of convenience foods, it seems there are always consumers who appreciate the tastes of authenticity. That is pretty much what Vern and Peg Leippi were banking on when they launched Peg's Legs out of their farm home in 1996.

"We started with turkey legs at Kronau," recalls Mrs. Leippi. "We cured them, smoked them and cooked them. That was our very first product. We were farming at the time and did this mostly in the winter. We quit farming in 1997."

The Leippis celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary in 1998 and made their own cabbage rolls and sausage for their outdoor party for 250 people.

"The reaction we got was: 'Oh, your food is so good,'" she reminisces. "From then on, we just kept going. Our cabbage rolls really took off. They were first and foremost among our products. We took them to our first craft sale in 1999, in Lumsden, and we sold out in one hour and a half. We took orders, and from there we just kept on growing."

The Leippis used to prepare their food on their kitchen table, and then they built a commercial kitchen in the basement of their farm home. They stayed on the farm for three years, but in 2002, they moved to their present storefront location at 1653 Park Street in Regina. They changed the name of the business from Peg's Legs to Peg's Kitchen shortly after arriving in the city.

"It was quite funny," says Mrs. Leippi. "We were getting calls from people who thought we did cosmetic hair removal, or were a dance studio, or sold prostheses."

Now, Peg's Kitchen makes five kinds of cabbage rolls and 20 kinds of sausages ... and they still do the turkey legs. Peg's Kitchen also sells perogies, which they don't make but instead contract from different producers in Saskatchewan. Peg's Kitchen is Regina's Saskatchewan Made store, and carries all the Saskatchewan Made-branded products: jams, jellies, flax, pickles and preserves, cookie dough and sweets. The store also sells some crafts, music, art works and books, and they operate a take-out deli at lunch time from Monday to Friday, where they offer their cabbage rolls and sausage or homemade beef or pork hamburgers.

Mrs. Leippi says their customers come from all income categories, and generally range from 30 years old and up.

"The homemade taste and smell bring them back," she says. "We hear over and over that we make the world's best cabbage rolls. For the sausage, my husband uses low fat beef and pork. So you don't get the flame-up on the barbeque that usually happens when the fat drips into the fire."

All of Peg's Kitchen's recipes were passed down through the family. "The sausages come from Vern's family and the cabbage rolls come from mine," she says. Rest at ease… Saskatchewan's culinary heritage is in good hands at Peg's Kitchen.

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